

Engineers prepare to return home after year in Iraq

From combat to stabilization
555th gave support to 4th ID

By Sgt. Jeremy Heckler
Task Force Olympia Public Affairs

MOSUL, Iraq — At a small outpost near Tikrit, Soldiers from the 555th Engineer Group prepare to return home to Fort Lewis after almost a year in Iraq.

“Up here, we were monitoring up to six battalions of engineers from active, Reserve and National Guard, performing missions from across the entire division theater,” said Sgt. Rob

Lively, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 555th Engineer Group.

“Although we are not a brigade we acted like an engineering brigade attached to 4th Infantry Division,” said Maj. Mark Deschenes, operations officer, 555th Engineer Group.

During their stay in Tikrit, the unit was responsible for all of the 4th Infantry Division’s engineer projects.

Deschenes said the unit built the longest assault bridge ever emplaced during combat operations when the division moved across the Tigris River. They also constructed and maintained five other bridges that kept the roads open for travel across Iraq.

The group was also home to Task

Force Trailblazer that patrolled the major supply routes for improvised explosive devices and other obstacles.

Deschenes said the unit patrolled more than 36,000 kilometers and found more than 100 improvised explosive devices, caches and pieces of unexploded ordnance.

In addition to keeping the roads safe, “Triple Nickel” also improved the quality of life for Soldiers in Iraq through the construction of forward operating bases.

“We built 53 forward operating bases for the 4th Infantry Division spread over the entire division area of operations,” said Deschenes. “These FOBs provided over 20,000 Soldiers a

relatively safe, convenient and comfortable environment, where our Soldiers live, work and prepare for missions.”

Some of that work included bringing in living containers and building showers and other facilities to improve the quality of life for deployed Soldiers.

Assistance for Soldiers far from home also came from family readiness groups and the family resource center back at Fort Lewis. These organizations helped families cope with their loved ones being gone for long periods of time.

“The family resource center has been incredible,” said Col. Christo-

pher Toomey, commander, 555th Engineer Group. “They have given away trips to Hawaii for Soldiers and really helped the families back at home.”

Toomey said the center began work helping families adjust to the return of their Soldier by organizing a family reunion workshop that was attended by over 150 spouses.

As the Soldiers from the “Triple Nickel,” prepare to hand over their mission to the 1st Infantry Division and head back to Fort Lewis, they remain ready for the next mission.

“We are just waiting to know what we’ll be doing next in the global war on terror,” said Toomey.

Soldiers get help from nationals to operate mall

Facility offers snacks, services for troops at Iraq base camp

Task Force Olympia News Release

MOSUL, Iraq — The Performance Mall recently came under new management after the 101st Airborne Division redeployed from Northern Iraq. The 296th Brigade Support Battalion is now responsible for the operation of the newly named Frontline Mall at Camp Marez.

The mall is open Saturdays through Thursdays and is closed Fridays in observance of the Muslim Sabbath day. The mall provides servicemembers a coffee shop, two barbers, laundry services, a beauty salon, computer store, pizza shop, tailor services, Internet café and two general stores.

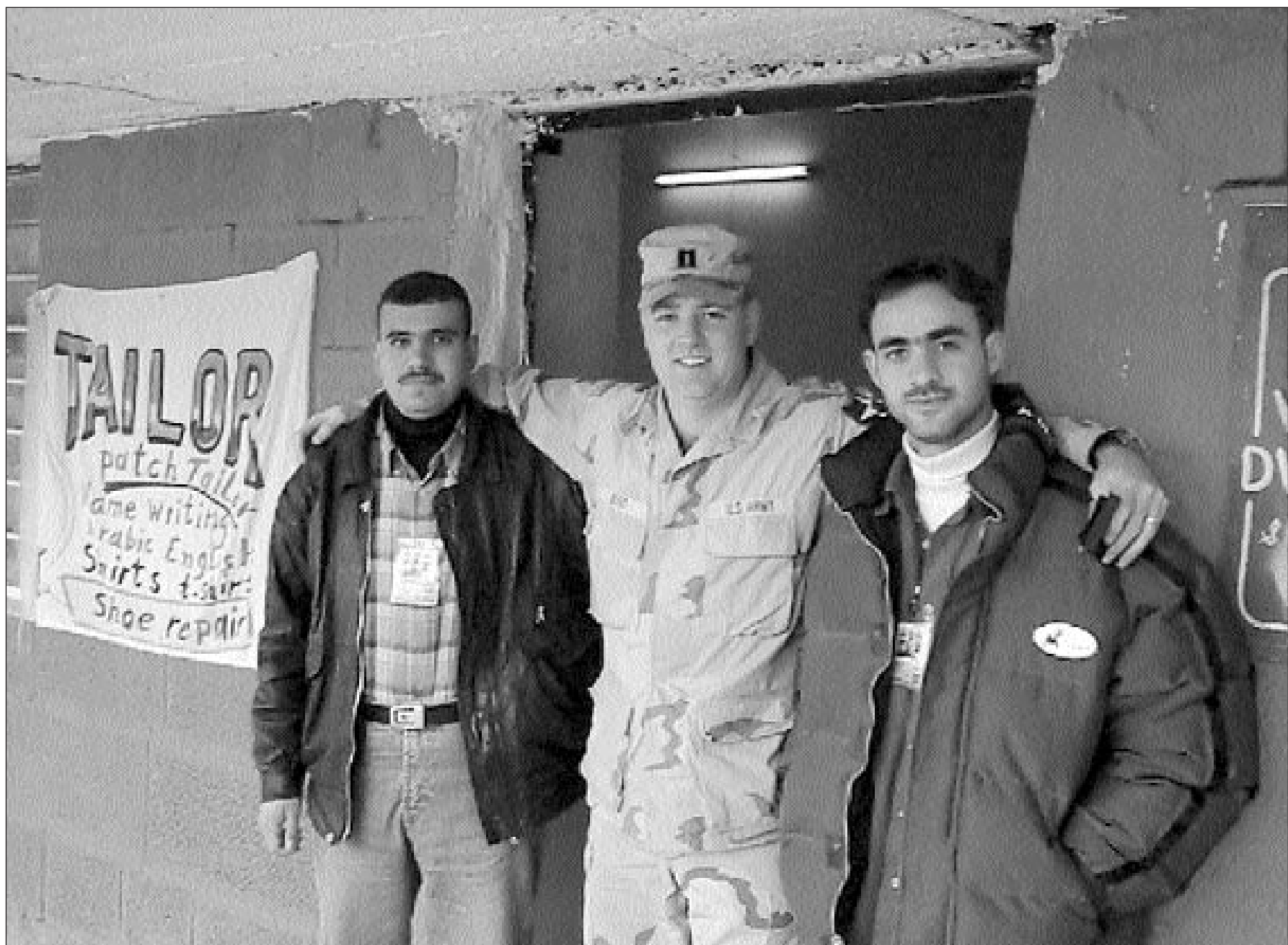
Local nationals run all the shops, so they offer servicemembers many items indigenous to Iraq in addition to the basic necessities.

Capt. Scott Byrd, logistics officer for the 296th BSB, oversees the mall operations and has the unique opportunity of working with the local nationals.

“When I arrived in Mosul, I found myself being very cautious while interacting with the local population,” Byrd said. “What I have come to learn is that my ideas about this country and its people were not correct.”

Byrd initially believed that the people of Iraq would isolate themselves from the U.S. Soldiers because of religious and cultural differences.

“Ironically, they’re just as curious about Americans as we are of them,” Byrd said. “The Iraqi people are always willing to teach Soldiers about them-



Courtesy Photo

Capt. Scott Byrd (center) spends time with Rayan Ra’ad and Emad Ismail outside their tailor shop at Frontline Mall. Byrd is the logistical officer for the 296th Brigade Support Battalion and is in charge of the Iraqi-run mall that serves deployed Soldiers at Camp Marez.

selves, their family, customs and beliefs.”

Iraqi employees have also benefited from the joint endeavor.

After studying chemistry in college, Rayan Ra’ad served six months in the Iraqi military where many soldiers were treated horribly, sometimes going without food, water or pay. Emad Ismail, a

taxi driver and mechanic, could not find work and was struggling to provide for himself and his family.

Today, both men work in the mall’s tailor shop as a means of supporting their families and are very happy to serve the Soldiers by providing them quality tailor services.

“They want a better life for themselves,” Byrd said. “They want to raise their children in a safe environment, get an education, buy homes, have cars and enjoy the same amenities that we take for granted in America.”

Byrd said he enjoys being able to sit down with the Iraqis and discuss politics

and economic issues. They also share their personal lives with one another and Byrd hopes the relationship continues.

“It has been an absolute privilege to work with the Iraqis and I look forward to our country fostering a cooperative, productive and mutually beneficial relationship in the future,” he said.

Project management office receives 2003 excellence award

By Jason Kaye
Northwest Guardian

The U.S. Army Brigade Combat Team Project Management Office was recently recognized with the 2003 Secretary of the Army Award for Environmental Excellence in Weapons System Acquisition.

The team, responsible for development of the Stryker, was given the award because of its attention to and understanding of the environmental impacts of the vehicle through out its entire development, use and eventual disposal.

“This program truly went above and beyond environmental requirements to ensure the Stryker vehicles were free, not only of ozone depleting substances, but

also of a host of materials that could be detrimental to the environment,” said Peter Stemniski, Director of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology’s Environmental Support Office and judging panel member in a press release from the Army Environmental center.

Team members from Fort Lewis made major contributions to the winning of the award, and their input even lead to a design change in the Stryker that allowed for recovery of fluids from the hull.

“If you don’t allow the fluids to mix then you maximize your opportunity to recycle it. Otherwise it’s just a big mixed waste and the Army has to pay to dispose of it,” said Terry Austin, who gave the

installation perspective on the project’s environmental management team.

Paul Steucke, chief of the environmental division for Fort Lewis’ Public Works, was honored to have been part of the team.

“Winning this award means a few things for Fort Lewis. It shows that we are forward thinking enough in the development process to take the environment into account, and it also takes into consideration that there is a strategic benefit outside the fact that it’s good for the planet. It’s great to be part of a team that’s made such great strides,” said Steucke.

The Fort Lewis representatives also suggested changes to the chemical agent resistant coatings on the vehicle. The

CARC paint has traditionally had a high volatile organic content, which means that it emits toxic vapors.

“We’re looking at CARC paints that are solvent based or that are more water based, so there’s less safety health hazard to the person painting and to people in general because the all the air emissions go off into the atmosphere that surrounds you anyway. It had to be something that obviously could perform and do the job, so Army Research Lab has looked into that, and we’ve done some testing here on Fort Lewis as part of our sustainability program,” said Austin.

The BCT Project Management Office will now move on to compete for the Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards.

Soldier accused in frag incident could get death

By Joe Burlas
Army News Service

WASHINGTON — The 101st Airborne Division Soldier accused of killing two officers and wounding 14 other Soldiers by rolling grenades into three tents in Kuwait last March will be tried by general court-martial.

Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, commander of XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg, N.C., referred charges against Sgt. Hasan Akbar March 3 as a capital case.

Akbar is accused of two specifications of premeditated murder under Article 118 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and three specifications of attempted premeditated murder under Article 80. The time between the March 22, 2003, incident and the referral of charges is due to delays, officials said.

First, the 101st Airborne Division was decisively engaged in major Operation Iraqi Freedom hostilities immediately following the incident, and in stability and support operations afterward. Akbar was transferred to the division’s higher headquarters, the XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, in July as 101st stability and support operations in Iraq continued.

The second delay was due to a request from Akbar’s defense counsel for sufficient time to prepare for the case. A civilian attorney, at no cost to the government, and two military lawyers are currently representing Akbar, officials said.

The case against Akbar was presented to Vines for a decision on how to proceed in late February.

Akbar faces a potential death sentence if convicted. He is being held in pretrial confinement at the Fort Knox, Ky., Regional Correction Facility. The trial will be held at Fort Bragg.

No date has been set for the general court-martial, though officials anticipate the trial will begin this summer.

(Editor’s note: An XVIII Airborne Corps release contributed to this article.)

Reconnaissance balloons could make comeback as defense tool

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

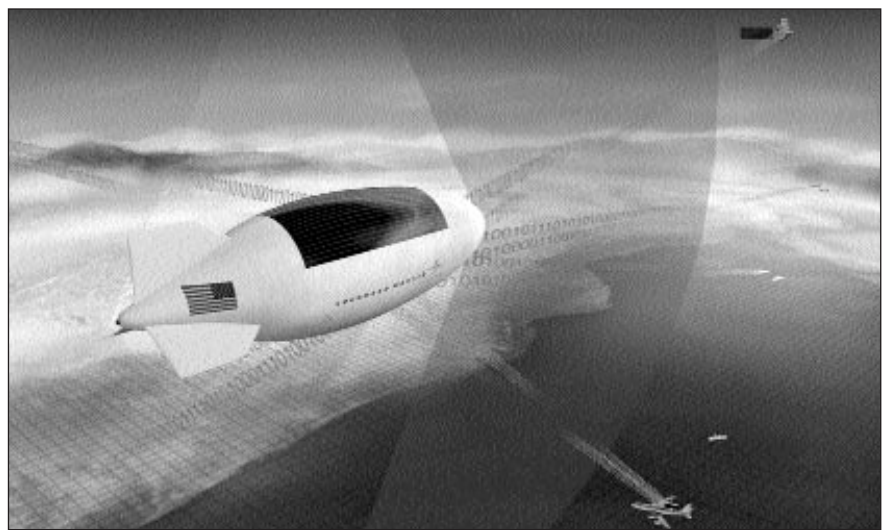
WASHINGTON — Decades after their last military use, lighter-than-air craft — balloons — may be coming back into the inventory.

High altitude balloons may be employed as a tool to detect potential attacks against the United States, DOD officials told House subcommittee members March 4.

“We believe the best way to protect Americans is to defeat terrorists as far away from our homeland as we can,” Air National Guard Maj. Gen. John A. Love said in his prepared testimony before the House Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee. Love is a senior officer with U.S. Northern Command, the unified command charged with defending the United States from land, air and sea attack.

Paul McHale, assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and National Guard Bureau chief Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum also provided testimony.

While U.S. troops are taking the fight to terrorists in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, Love asserted it’s also important “to win the ‘home game’ by protecting, defending and defeating threats against our nation.”



Lockheed Martin

An artist’s rendering of Lockheed Martin’s High Altitude Airship. Missions for the 5.6 million cubic foot HAA range from military surveillance to commercial telecommunications.

Recent technology demonstrations, Love said, point to the potential use of airships to patrol a 500-mile “buffer zone” established outward from the American coastline.

High-altitude airships, Love continued, could provide “over-the-horizon” surveillance across North America “and out from

our coastal waters for air, ground and maritime threats.”

Use of airships for homeland defense purposes, McHale explained, is consistent with DOD’s charter to provide “the military defense of our nation from attacks that originate from abroad.” Testing of prototype balloons, he said, demonstrated they

“could provide wide area surveillance and communications capabilities.”

McHale pointed out DOD’s partner role with the Department of Homeland Security in its mission of protecting the nation against, and preparing for, acts of terrorism. DOD, McHale said, stands ready to “provide assets and capabilities in support of civil authorities, consistent with U.S. law.”

National Guard Bureau chief Lt. Gen. Blum told House committee members the Guard “is uniquely suited for operational missions inside the U.S. to help protect both the American people and our critical infrastructure.”

In fact, there are now 32 certified Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams, the three-star general said, noting, “More are on the way.” Blum said each team features 22 Army and Air National Guard specialists trained to detect and identify chemical, biological or radiological hazards, and assist in follow-on activities.

Another initiative involves the reinforcement of WMD civil support teams, Blum noted, with “existing medical, engineer and security forces from either the Air or Army National Guard.”

The result, Blum pointed out, is “a more robust capability in response to a WMD incident.”